

Bush Delays Action on Lithuania, Not Wanting to Harm Gorbachev

By ANDREW ROSENTHAL

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WASHINGTON, April 24 — After conferring with allies and Congressional leaders, President Bush today delayed carrying out a threat to take action against Moscow for tightening its chokehold on Lithuania, fearing sanctions might undermine President Mikhail S. Gorbachev and worsen the Baltic crisis.

The decision, supported by European allies and some leading members of Congress, reflected Mr. Bush's own inclination not to move against Moscow in hopes of buying time for the Soviet Union and Lithuania to resolve their differences over the Baltic republic's declaration of independence. Mr. Bush has not been under any groundswell of public pressure to act against Moscow.

His decision today reflected a complicated equation of political pressures that the Administration has avoided spelling out in public. While it is eager to take a strong stand supporting Lithuanian independence, the United States does not believe that trying to force immediate independence is worth risking progress on arms control, upsetting the evolution in Eastern Europe or jeopardizing Mr. Gorbachev's domestic political position.

Appearing before agriculture writers today at the White House, Mr. Bush said his inaction was motivated by a fear of provoking the Soviet Union at a tense moment. "I may do some-

thing imprudent," Mr. Bush said. "I am concerned that we not do anything that would cause the Soviet Union to take action that would set back the cause of freedom around the world."

Some members of Congress said today that economic sanctions are in order. But after a White House meeting with Mr. Bush, most of those who attended backed the President.

The House Speaker, Representative

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